

1.111.4

Automate system administration tasks by scheduling jobs to run in the future

Weight 4

Linux Professional Institute Certification — 102

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document

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2005 July

Outline

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration:

anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document

Topic 111 Administrative Tasks [21]

Where we are up to

- 1.111.1 Manage users and group accounts and related system files [4]
- 1.111.2 Tune the user environment and system environment variables [3]
- 1.111.3 Configure and use system log files to meet administrative and security needs [3]
- 1.111.4 **Automate system administration tasks by scheduling jobs to run in the future [4]**
- 1.111.5 Maintain an effective data backup strategy [3]
- 1.111.6 Maintain system time [4]

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document

Description of Objective

1.111.4 Automate system administration tasks by scheduling jobs to run in the future

Candidate should be able to use cron or anacron to run jobs at regular intervals and to use at to run jobs at a specific time. Task include managing cron and at jobs and configuring user access to cron and at services.

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document

111.4 Scheduling jobs [4]

Key files, terms and utilities

<code>crontab</code>	<code>at</code>
	<code>atq</code>
<code>/etc/anacrontab</code>	<code>/etc/at.deny</code>
<code>/etc/crontab</code>	<code>/etc/at.allow</code>
<code>/etc/cron.allow</code>	
<code>/etc/cron.deny</code>	
<code>/var/spool/cron/*</code>	

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

License Of This
Document

Basically

- ▶ `at` – Run a command once
- ▶ `cron` – Run a command periodically

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The `cron` System

`anacron`

License Of This
Document

The `at` command

`at` takes a time and a list of commands to run. Any output to `STDOUT` or `STDERR` will be mailed to the user running `at`.

```
$ at 2pm ↵  
warning: commands will be executed using /bin/sh  
at> date ↵  
at> ^D ↵  
job 3 at 2002-05-08 14:00
```

The `at` command

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document

The current `umask`, working directory and environment (except for `TERM`, `DISPLAY` and `_`) are saved and restored before running the job (unlike `cron`).

The commands to run will be read from `STDIN` or from a file given with `-f`.

Outline

Context

Objective

Introduction

at **command**

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration:

anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at **command**

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document

Example `at` time specifications

`at` allows a *very* flexible time format.

`17:36` Run at 5:36pm today or tomorrow.

`9pm May 8` Run at 9pm on May 8th.

`noon tomorrow` Run at 12pm tomorrow.

`now + 2 hours` Run in 2 hours.

See `at(1)` for more details.

Queued jobs

`atq` lists a user's pending jobs.

```
$ atq ↵  
3          2002-05-08 14:00 a gus
```

\$ **atrm 3** ↵ removes the queued job.

\$ **at -c 3** ↵ dumps the job on STDOUT.

Outline

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration:

anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

crontab

`crond` is a daemon that reads everyone's `crontab` information, spawning new tasks at the appropriate times.

`crontab file` Replace your crontab file with *file*.

`crontab -l` List your crontab.

`crontab -r` Remove your crontab.

`crontab -e` Edit your crontab (with `$EDITOR`).

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

License Of This
Document

Outline

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration:

anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

crontab file format

A sample crontab file:

```
0 7 1 jan * echo "sleep in, you dont feel so good"  
# gratuitous noise  
0 17 * * mon,wed,fri wall%meeting in 5 minutes%  
0 9-18/2 * * mon-fri $HOME/bin/cron.bihourly
```

Line based, hash comments, ignored blank lines, etc

- ▶ Minute (0-59)
- ▶ Hour (0-23)
- ▶ Day of month (1-31)
- ▶ Month (1-12 or jan-dec)
- ▶ Day of week (0-7 or sun-sat)
- ▶ Step
- ▶ Wildcard
- ▶ Ranges
- ▶ Lists

See [crontab\(5\)](#) for:

- ▶ Environment variables
- ▶ Providing STDIN

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

crontab file format

A sample crontab file:

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- ▶ Providing STDIN

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

crontab file format

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- ▶ Step
- ▶ Wildcard
- ▶ Ranges
- ▶ Lists

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- ▶ Environment variables
- ▶ Providing STDIN

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

crontab file format

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0 7 1 jan * echo "sleep in, you dont feel so good"  
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- ▶ Ranges
- ▶ Lists

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crontab file format

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- ▶ Step
- ▶ Wildcard
- ▶ Ranges
- ▶ Lists

See [crontab\(5\)](#) for:

- ▶ Environment variables
- ▶ Providing STDIN

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

crontab file format

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- ▶ Step
- ▶ Wildcard
- ▶ Ranges
- ▶ Lists

See [crontab\(5\)](#) for:

- ▶ Environment variables
- ▶ Providing STDIN

Outline

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration:

anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

License Of This
Document

cron from root

A few extra issues arise when editing `/etc/crontab` (and similar “system” crontab files):

- ▶ Don't use `crontab -e`, edit `/etc/crontab` directly.
- ▶ A new column (after timespec, before command) gives the user to the command run as.
- ▶ Distributions often create directories for “common” frequencies. It usually makes much more sense to place a script in there, rather than adding your own crontab lines. Debian, Red Hat runs any scripts in `/etc/cron.{daily,weekly,monthly}` – but these are triggered from normal entries in `/etc/crontab`, so there's no real mystery here.
- ▶ `/etc/cron.d/*` is read in addition to `/etc/crontab` (they also have the extra user field).

Apparently some people turn their machines off.

If your computer is always turned off at night (for example), then daily jobs which are usually scheduled to run in the wee hours, will never be run. This is a problem.

`anacron` fixes this by running any missed jobs after a reboot (or other times, like AC-on for laptops).

Outline

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration:

anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

anacron

anacron configuration:
anacrontab

License Of This
Document

anacron configuration: anacrontab

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

anacron configuration:
anacrontab

License Of This
Document

Since anacron can't use the crontab files, it has its own simplified `/etc/anacrontab`.

If you only use the standard `/etc/cron.daily`, `monthly`, `weekly`, then no further configuration will be necessary. Otherwise, see [anacrontab\(5\)](#).

Note that the frequency of anacron jobs can only be specified in days.

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration: anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at command

The cron System

anacron

anacron configuration:
anacrontab

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration: `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration:
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration: `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4
Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration:
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at **command**

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration: anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

anacron configuration:
anacrontab

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at **command**

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration: anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

anacron configuration:
anacrontab

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at `command`

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration: `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration:
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at `command`

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration: `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration:
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at **command**

Specifying the time for at

The cron System

crontab

crontab file format

Setting up cron for root

anacron

anacron configuration: anacrontab

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

anacron configuration:
anacrontab

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at `command`

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration: `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration:
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at `command`

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration: `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` configuration:
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at `command`

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` **configuration:** `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` **configuration:**
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

Topics Covered

Context

Objective

Introduction

at `command`

Specifying the time for `at`

The cron System

`crontab`

`crontab` file format

Setting up cron for root

`anacron`

`anacron` **configuration:** `anacrontab`

License Of This Document

1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

`at` command

The cron System

`anacron`

`anacron` **configuration:**
`anacrontab`

License Of This
Document

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1.111.4

Automate system
administration tasks by
scheduling jobs to run
in the future
Weight 4

Angus Lees

Context

Objective

Introduction

at: command

The cron System

anacron

License Of This
Document